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ABSTRACT

This study reviewed six history textbooks widely used in grades 7-12 across the U.S. Using a story-line analysis, the findings of this study suggest: (1) textbooks reinforce negative stereotypes of Latin Americans as lazy, passive, irresponsible, and, somewhat paradoxically, lustful, animalistic and violent; (2) the method of description employed was the use of subtle or not-so-subtle adjectives, adverbs and parenthetical comments of derision; and (3) when Latin America and Latin Americans are included in the text, the usual role is through conflict, either the Mexican-American War or the Spanish-American War. The study contends that textbooks can be a useful resource but that a balance of presentation must be maintained. Contains 21 references and a list of 9 textbooks reviewed. (EH)

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STEREOTYPES OF LATIN AMERICANS PERPETUATED IN SECONDARY SCHOOL HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

Bárbara C. Cruz

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This investigation reviewed widely used history textbooks used in grades 7-12 for the purpose of assessing the representation of people from Latin America. The findings indicate that many of the texts currently used in United States schools reinforce the stereotypes of Latin Americans as lazy, passive, irresponsible, lustful, animalistic, and violent.

The Texas Board of Education recently found itself in the center of a well-publicized textbook controversy after the board's reviewers examined and approved ten history textbooks for state adoption; a watchdog group submitted a list of 231 factual errors identified in the books. After outside experts were retained and a thorough review was completed, over 5,000 errors were discovered in the ten books published by "the biggest names in the business" *(St. Petersburg Times,* 1992:12A). The errors were not the type of scholarly minutiae that only the most erudite of historians could unearth, but included such misinformation as, stating that President Truman deployed the atomic bomb in Korea; declaring that American troops encountered "powerful resistance" in the Bay of Pigs invasion (when, in fact no United States troops were involved in the failed assault); and identifying the leader of the 1950s crusade in the U.S. against Communists as General Douglas MacArthur.

The experts were looking for errors of fact, mostly incorrect information dealing with names, dates, and places. If over 5,000 factual errors were discovered, what might an analysis of context, tone, and bias disclose? What would an analysis of the textbook treatment of ethnic minorities reveal?

Author's note: For engaging in early discussions on this topic and helping me to articulate my position on it, I would like to thank Pedro R. Bermúdez, an incomparable teacher dedicated to multiperspectived education. For her assistance and encouragement, I would also like to recognize Maria E. Cadeño, a fine educator committed to equal educational opportunity for all students. And finally, this article benefitted from the comments of James A. Eison who reviewed early drafts, the suggesttions offered by Felix M. Padilla on later drafts, and Kevin A. Yelvington for this thorough review of the final draft and unceasing encouragement; I am grateful for their keen academic evalutions.

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These are precisely the questions that this paper examines. Specifically, how are people in Latin America portrayed? Which stereotypes are persistently sustained? Are the representations overt or subtle? What are the implications of these negative depictions of Latin Americans for Latino students in the United States? And finally, what can review boards and textbook publishers do to correct the situation?

Research regarding the treatment of minority groups in school textbooks dates back to at least the teens in this century (Pratt, 1972:6), although the term "minority" has primarily meant African-Americans and Native-Americans. Particularly between 1930 and 1970, the treatment of certain ethnic groups in textbooks was of interest to dissertation writers, but was not of much interest to educational researchers (Elliott & Woodward, 1990: vii).

Most studies which analyze minorities in textbooks are quantitative analyses that report the frequency with which minority groups are mentioned or featured in words, photographs or pictures (e.g., Reimer, 1992). That is, the researcher counted the number of times African-Americans were mentioned in a text, or how many times women were included in the treatment. Sleeter and Grant (1991) have found that the percentage of space devoted to the coverage of African-Americans can range from just two percent to six-and-a-half percent of the total text. Pictorially, social studies textbooks (grades 1-8) usually feature Latinos (people of Latin American origins residing in the United States) in three percent or less of the pictures (Sleeter & Grant, 1991:84). Considering the importance of pictorial representation for the early grades (high pictorial to text ratio is a criteria in elementary textbook selection) in terms of student interest and comprehension, the omission of these visualizations is critical.

Rollock's updated review of children's literature found that there has actually been a decrease in children's literature concerning the African-American experience since the 1960s (1984). This is significant because African-Americans typically receive, by far, the greatest amount of "attention" in these texts. The space in U.S. history textbooks devoted to the experiences of other ethnic minority groups such Mexicans, Chinese, or Japanese is commonly one-tenth to four-tenths of one percent of an entire book. Bishop found that Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans are mentioned even less (1987). Latinos

as the largest and fastest growing population the United States, Latinos continue to be poorly represented in children's literature (Reimer, 1992:16).

Although research that notes frequency is a useful starting point, most of it fails to analyze the *content* of these treatments --- the *content* of the reference and the *context within which* the reference is made. Yet this is the very content analysis that is so needed as many textbook passages misrepresent ethnic minorities and serve to perpetuate the various pernicious stereotypes that continue to exist. In one of the few works to do just this, Nieto found that children's books available about the Puerto Rican experience served to portray the group as helpless, passive, and at the root of their own misfortune (1982).

The Role of Textbooks in American Education

There is no doubt that the textbook is the most often-used resource in the classroom today (Zevin, 1992). As Downs points out, "textbooks, for better or worse, dominate what students learn" (1988:viii). Others would argue that the textbook is the "major conveyor of the curriculum" (Sleeter and Grant, 1991:80). "As Tyson-Berstein writes, "according to virtually all studies of the matter, textbooks have become the *de facto* curriculum of the public schools, as well as the *de facto* mechanism for controlling teachers" (1988:11). Pre-service teachers, that is, education majors who have not yet completed their intial training, are amazed to find out that they do not have to structure subject matter and daily lesson plans around the course text. This is testimony to the fact that teachers regard the textbook to be authoritative, accurate, and definitive.

Most states in the United States have a statute which mandates that each student is to have a textbook assigned to him/her for each course of study. Indeed, in some schools students have one textbook issued for their home usage, and one class set to be used at school.

Almost half the states in the United States have state textbook adoption committees that select which texts will be purchased and used in the schools. Interestingly, all of these states are in the south and the "sun belt" (Apple and Christian-Smith, 1991:5). In Florida, these adoption committees are comprised of classroom teachers, supervisors, lay citizens, and school board members (State of Florida, 1990:ii),

although they do not necessarily interface with each other as the review and selection process occurs. In fact, Florida is one of nine states that requires that lay citizens serve on the textbook adoption councils (Cody, 1990: 127-145). Ostensibly, the committees use the instructional goals and objectives for the course in question to guide their review of the texts; those texts which best reflect or explain the mandated curriculum are the ones that are recommended for adoption. Twenty-two states effectively control which textbooks will be used in their schools by providing funds for only those books selected from their state-approved list (Westbury, 1990:13).

Although contemporary teaching methods courses at the university level have begun to de-emphasize the role of the textbook, by all accounts the textbook still enjoys a primary position in the delivery of content information and, in many cases, in the development of curriculum and instructional strategy.

Procedure

The following research findings are based on a review of six textbooks which are widely used in grades 7-12 across the United States. While they are not the only ones, they are representative of the kinds of texts that are used in our nation's public school systems. Additionally, two other texts were included in the review because of their popularity as supplemental texts in the teaching of Latin America (a complete list of the textbooks are provided at the end).

I was prompted to do this research after I conducted an informal survey of twenty [n = 20] undergraduate students enrolled in a social studies teaching methods course and ten [n = 10] colleagues at a major urban university. The question was posed to them: "When can you remember being taught about Latinos in U.S. history?" The majority of the respondents indicated that they were not taught about Latinos per se. Instead, they recall being taught about Latin America. This conceptual confusion is important as we will see, because depictions about Latin America have ramifications for how Latinos are viewed and how they come to view themselves.

In the depiction of Latin America, two-time periods are identified repeatedly in the textbooks: "The Mexican-American War" and "The Spanish-American War" (it is worth noting that both of these events are

conflict oriented). These seemed to be two situations in United States history where Latin Americans are mentioned and Latin America is studied to some degree. Therefore, I reviewed the textbooks with mainly those two events in mind.

A story-line analysis was used, which according to Sleeter and Grant, "involves analyzing which group receives the most sustained attention (whose story is being told), which group(s) resolves problems, and who the author intends the reader to sympathize with or learn most about" (1991:82). I focused on stereotypes and how they are introduced and reinforced.

All quotations are exactly as they appear in the textbooks, while italics have been added for emphasis. When appropriate and available, better written passages are juxtaposed for comparison. Due to space limitations, only the most salient examples are included in this article.

Findings

The findings of this investigation indicate that many of the most popular history textbooks currently in use at the secondary level reinforce the stereotypes of Latin Americans as lazy, passive, irresponsible, and somewhat paradoxically, lustful, animalistic and violent. The method employed, whether intentional or not, tended to use subtle and not-so-subtle adjectives, adverbs, and parenthetical comments. The insinuations are disturbing and some of the misinformation presented is academically irresponsible.

Latin Americans as Lazy

One of the most pernicious stereotypes concerning Latin America, and especially Mexico, is the lazy, slow-witted, siesta-taking Latin American. Many restaurants, motels, and other establishments which seek to depict a "south of the border" motif typically use the visualization of a Mexican, wrapped in a *serape* (a woolen cloak or poncho), asleep underneath a cactus. This stereotype had at least two incarnations in the textbooks reviewed.

In one of the most popular textbooks in the United States (in Florida it is the Advanced Placement text of choice), *The American Pageant,* the section on the Mexican-American War is entitled, "The Mastering of Mexico," and asserts:

American operations in the Southwest and in California were completely successful. In 1846 General Stephen W. Kearny led a detachment of seventeen hundred troops over the famous Santa Fe trail from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe. *This sunbaked outpost, with its drowsy plazas, was easily captured* (Bailey & Kennedy, 1987:283-4).

In a very subtle manner, the description of the settlement perpetuates the stereotype of the lazy, sleeping Latino.

In the same textbook, the treatment of the Spanish-American War was entitled, "Revolt in the Cuban Pesthouse," and was treated in this manner:

An outraged public demanded action. Congress in 1896 overwhelmingly passed a resolution that called upon President Cleveland to recognize the belligerency of the revolted Cubans. *But as the government of the insurgents consisted of hardly more than a few fugitive leaders under palm trees, Cleveland an antijingoist and anti-imperialist refused to budge* (Bailey & Kennedy, 1987:600).

This same textbook, incidentally, contends that "the Spanish-American War was a kind of gigantic coming-out party" (Bailey & Kennedy, 1987:612).

Latin Americans as Passive

Those familiar with John Johnson's *Latin America in Caricature, will* not be surprised that Latin Americans have often been depicted as passive and exploitable (1980). There are various phrases that are used in texts such as "The Mastering of Mexico" and "Dominance in the Americas" (May, 1985:564) that surface time and again and encourage students to perceive Latin Americans as something to be taken, to be dominated, indeed, to be consumed. Consider this passage on the spoils of the Spanish-American War:

The Americans had little difficulty in securing the remote Pacific island of Guam, which they had captured early in the conflict from astonished Spaniards who, lacking a cable, had not known that a war was on. *They also picked up Puerto Rico, the last crumb of Spain's once magnificent American empire. It was to prove a difficult morsel for Uncle Sam to digest* (Bailey & Kennedy, 1987:608).

This passage clearly presents Puerto Rico as a food, to be had by a first world power and, quite literally, to be ingested.

Another problem observed regarding the Spanish-American War was the lack of discussion about Cuba's involvement in the conflict. The picture painted is of the United States unilaterally resolving the situation:

> The biggest battle [of the Spanish-American War] took place in Cuba. Theodore Roosevelt left his government post to participate in this war. He organized a group of soldiers called the 'Rough Riders.' They charged and captured San Juan Hill in Cuba. The capture made Roosevelt a national hero (Napp & King, 1989:385).

This same lack of discussion is applied to the treatment of the eradication of yellow fever. Although Dr. Carlos Finlay, a Cuban physician, was the first to hypothesize about the transmission of the disease by mosquitos, he is very rarely mentioned, with full credit given to the Americans. To wit:

> Cuba, scorched and chaotic, presented another headache. An American military government, set up under the administrative genius of General Leonard Wood of Rough Rider fame, wrought miracles in government, finance, education, agriculture, and public health. Under his leadership a frontal attack was launched on yellow fever. Spectacular experiments were performed by Dr. Walter Reed and others upon American soldiers... (Bailey & Kennedy, 1987:612).

However, there are alternatives to such a one-sided depiction. The following selection demonstrates how the contributions of persons from both countries can be incorporated:

> A team of four army surgeons under Dr. Walter Reed was appointed to try to find out what caused the disease. The team decided to work on a theory that had been proposed by a Cuban. Dr. Carlos Finlay believed that yellow fever is carried from person to person by a species of mosquito. Within a year the theory was proved correct...By 1901 Havana was free of yellow fever (Jordan, Greenblatt, & Bowes, 1991: 520).

Latin Americans as Animals

Adding to the dehumanizing tendency of some texts, many texts are guilty of representing Latin Americans as animals. References such as "Revolt in the Cuban Pesthouse" liken Cubans to insects. So, for

example, there is mention of a battle in the American conquest of Mexico in the following manner.

> Learning that Santa Anna was on his way, Taylor pulled his troops into the little town of Buena Vista in February, 1847, and prepared to face an attack. In the first part of the battle that followed the Americans were badly mauled (Graff, 1985:338).

This particular reference prompted a student to once ask me in class if this battle used hand-to-hand combat; the image of Mexicans literally mauling Americans (like bears would) was quite vivid.

Yet, most references to American victories are sanitized--note the first example which stated that Kearny "led a successful campaign." When Latin Americans were victorious they "mauled," "maimed," and "pillaged."

Another passage concerning the Spanish-American War uses a term that has been widely contested by Native Americans:

> In that year another Cuban revolt began. Spain sent General Valeriano "Butcher" Weyler to crush the revolt. *He herded Cubans* into concentration camps so that they could not help the rebels (May, 1985:559).

One of the terms that Native Americans have objected to is the use of the term "herded" (as in, herded onto reservations), even if it is used to describe atrocious conditions. It cannot be assumed that students will interpret the intended meaning correctly, as is evidenced by the student who questioned the use of "mauling."

Consider the following passage which uses language that suggests atrocity, without having to use offensive terminology:

> To counter the insurgents, the Spanish adopted what they called a reconcentration policy, which meant forcing thousands of people out of their homes and into camps enclosed by barbed wire... The reconcentration camps became places of unimaginable torment, with starvation and disease widespread (Graff, 1985:515).

Latin Americans as Violent

This investigation also found that although the death tolls for the American side were always reported (especially in the Mexican-American War), very rarely were death tolls for Mexicans mentioned. Students'

sympathies and perceptions are very much shaped by this type of selective reporting. This kind of omission serves to dehumanize "the enemy," and in this particular case, Mexicans.

Latin Americans are often portrayed as a violent people who almost look forward to conflict.

> To Mexicans, the picture was clear, piece by piece, the United States was taking over their country. Yet they were confident that should it come to war, their nation would be victorious, since Mexico's army was much larger than the army of the United States. *In a way, they were anxious for war* (May, 1985:384).

This passage suffers from a lack of information and a supposition. That Mexicans were anxious for war is questionable; compare it to Schwartz and O'Connor's treatment of the same event:

> The Mexican government was certain it could win the war. Mexico's army was five times larger than that of the United States. Mexico felt that its soldiers were better fighters in the deserts of Mexico. It was certain that the northern states would not support the war, because Texas was a slave state. Mexico was mistaken (1986:244).

The latter passage presents Mexicans as logical, reasoning strategists rather than being merely "anxious for war."

The stereotype of people from Latin America as violent can surface in unusual places. One West Virginia teacher of Spanish I spoke to was concerned with the Spanish language textbook *Spanish for Mastery I* (D.C. Heath and Company, 1984), that is preferred and used in her district. In making a laudable attempt to teach about the culture as well as the language, the text includes a distressing photograph under "Las Fiestas" which features Puerto Rican youths dancing at a party (1984:99). The teacher reports that her students invariably focused upon the same feature in the photo every year, that the young man dancing in the foreground has a shiny, glinting switchblade case in his pants pocket. Many students interpret this as confirmation of the stereotype that most Puerto Ricans youths are involved with gangs and in street violence.

Latin Americans as Lawless and Corrupt

The gun-toting, bandolier-clad Latin American has been a pet image in cartoons, movies, Western TV shows. When this stereotype is reinforced in textbooks, it encourages students to perceive Latin Americans as a lawless people, who are particularly corrupt and seditious. Consider the following excerpt, not only in terms of the negative light in which Mexicans are cast, but also in how popular American personalities are depicted:

> By this time, too, new settlers were coming into Texas. They were ambitious men with forceful personalities. They included people such as Sam Houston, former congressman from Tennessee, and Davy Crockett, who had also served in Congress. These men and others like them saw no reason to live under Mexican law, *for in truth it was difficult to respect a government that kept changing all the time* as general succeeded general as head of the country (Jordan, Greenblatt, & Bowes, 1991:313).

Other passages insinuate corruption without providing evidence:

> In the meantime, a small group of Americans...went from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to Santa Fe, New Mexico. They captured Santa Fe without firing a shot, *probably because the Mexican governor there had been bribed to disappear* (Jordan, Genblatt, & Bowes, 1991:323).

This same sense of lawlessness and inability to govern was applied to Filipinos in a particularly offensive manner:

> Other alternatives open to McKinley were trouble-fraught. The ill-prepared native Filipinos, if left to govern themselves, might fall into anarchy...Seemingly the least of the evils consistent with national honor and safety was to acquire all the Philippines and then perhaps give the little brown brothers their freedom later...*The richer the natural resources of the islands appeared to be, the less capable of self-government the Filipinos seemed to be* (Bailey & Kennedy, 1987:609 & 610).

Although it may be argued that the authors intentionally used a sarcastic tone for emphasis and were really sympathetic toward the Filipinos, it cannot be assumed that students would be able to correctly discern this intention. For most students, these passages would probably be more likely to instill the notion that the Filipinos were incapable of self-government.

Latin Americans as Lustful and Lascivious

The myth of the "Don Juan"/"Latin Lover" has certainly been a favorite in Hollywood. It has also, unfortunately, been perpetuated in school textbooks.

The following is a passage on Simón Bolívar in one of the most respected textbooks on Latin America:

> Born into a wealthy creole family in Caracas in 1738, Bolívar was orphaned at the age of nine. He was then sent to Spain to complete his education, and after three years he returned to Caracas with a young Spanish bride, who within months died of yellow fever. Bolívar was devastated, and never remarried. (He did not deprive himself of female companionship, however) (Skidmore & Smith, 1989:30 31).

It is not at all clear why the parenthetical comment concluded this paragraph. The effect, however, is obvious: the stereotype of the Latin male as an ardent lover is corroborated.

Consider the following passage on Puerto Rico:

> Puerto Rico was a poverty-stricken island, *the fertility of whose million inhabitants, including many blacks, outran that of their soil...* Although the American regime worked wonders in education, sanitation, good roads, and other physical improvements, many of the inhabitants continued to clamor for independence (Bailey & Kennedy, 1987:611).

For many students, the visualization conjured up by this passage is of people procreating irresponsibly, out of control. It is interesting that although England similarly has a dense population, it is difficult to imagine reading about British fertility or the English outrunning *their* soil. Furthermore, the Americans are portrayed as the saviors with no discussion of the imperialist factors which may have contributed to the declining conditions in Puerto Rico.

The Dushkin Publishing Group publishes a "Global Studies" series of various regions of the world. Each book has a thumbnail sketch of each country in the region, typically about four pages in length. In the Latin American edition, the chapter on Cuba includes a special section entitled, "The Language of Revolution" and asserts:

> *Cuban males still make passes at virtually every passing female on the streets of Havana.* But *señorita* (miss) is no longer viewed as a proper form of address...The accepted farewell

is *hasta luego* (until later) in place of *adios*, with its religious connotation of go with God (Goodwin, 1990:104).

Although it is appropriate that a paragraph explaining the "language of the revolution" would include changes in the usage of greetings and titles, it is not understandable why the first sentence is included at all. It is also objectionable that such an indicting statement be presented in such a generalizing, all-inclusive fashion.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is imperative that measures be considered and taken to improve educational print materials; in school textbooks, there is now overwhelming evidence of significant bias and academic misinformation. These inaccuracies damage students of all ethnicities by promoting stereotypes, furthering ethnic bias, and promulgating inaccurate information.

As educators, we cannot afford to have any student feel embarrassed or humiliated about his/her culture or ethnicity because of the print materials used in class. The disgrace and shame that can accompany reading such inaccurate and racist information in class can lead students to feel alienated and may result in dropping out of the educational process, either mentally or physically.

Although the text examples cited in this research primarily concern people who lived in Latin America, the biases cast aspersions on Latinos in the United States as well. The denigration of Latin Americans can be a profound source of anxiety and humiliation for Latino students who may either be first or second generation immigrants, or who nonetheless feel a significant connection to their cultural heritage. These feelings of shame can possibly lead to lowered self-esteem, feelings of alienation, and lack of motivation which a great amount of recent research has linked to low achievement.

It is not contended that this investigation was an exhaustive, systematic study of all the United States history textbooks used in the United States, or even the entire contents of all of the textbooks surveyed. However, it is hoped that this exploration and preliminary findings will provoke teachers, historians, textbook publishers, and university-level educators to reassess the role of the textbook, its content, and challenge existing materials.

It should be noted, however, that not all educators feel that textbooks need to be reconsidered. Glazer and Ueda, for example, feel that perhaps textbooks devote too much space to ethnic and racial minorities so that the "main lines of American history are blurred or distorted" (1983). Frances Fitzgerald concludes that American history textbooks exaggerate the degree to which minorities in the United States were harmed by American racial and ethnocentric attitudes (1983). In fact, Fitzgerald is scornful of modern textbooks that attempt to engage in "compensatory history" or infuse multiple perspectives in the treatment of events.

Nonetheless, the evidence overwhelmingly indicates a need to reexamine the textbooks that are being used in our nation's schools. And since textbooks seem to part of the permanent classroom environment, it may be perhaps more important to reconsider the ways in which these textbooks are being utilized.

Firstly, it is important to remember that these are short, selected passages from larger tomes. All the textbooks surveyed can be useful resources --- with proper instructor mediation. Non-examples, in fact, can be seized upon as "critical teaching moments" and can be used very effectively to explore the underlying issue. But the examples discussed here do serve to remind us that something is amiss. Millions of American students are being exposed to stereotypes of other cultures, and these perceptions are being reinforced in U.S. classrooms.

Review boards for textbook adoption need to be balanced along ethnic, culture, and gender lines. Their recommendations must be more than merely a rubber-stamp; their advice must be heeded. It is worthwhile to consider adding students to the review process.

It is clear that research must take a turn to analyze content, as well as frequency. The frequency studies are useful starting points, but the actual content of the references can be, in many instances, most detrimental.

Research can be a powerful force and change agent in shaping educational policy. In fact, educational research has "contributed significantly to policy and practice regarding textbooks" (Chall & Conard, 1990:56). One of the best examples is the dramatic increase in the frequency of women and minorities in school textbooks. As a result of increasing research and ensuing political pressure, by the mid-1960s

more females and non-Anglos began to appear in both the text and illustrations (Woodward & Elliott, 1990:154).

Textbook publishers are sensitive to demands if consumers (teachers, parents, students, Latino organizations) insist on them. Because it is a profit-making business, textbook publishers must be responsive to the needs of the purchaser. As one textbook executive put it: "If the customer wants a pink stretch Cadillac, I may think it's tacky and wasteful, but I would be a fool to produce a fuel-efficient black compact if nobody is going to buy it" (Tyson-Bernstein, 1988:2).

Those who have an interest in the way Latinos are portrayed in our nation's schools must make it clear to publishers and school systems that sensitive, accurate portrayals of Latinos is an educational imperative.

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